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26 January 1956

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Comments on Intelligence Aspects of General Collins' Report

1. We concur in general with the intelligence aspects of General Collins' report and his estimates for the short-term future. His analysis of the situation is consistent with that of RIA 63-7-54, "Probable Developments in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia through July 1956," though his estimate of future prospects, based on recent developments, strikes a more optimistic tone. We agree that events in the last two months have improved the short-term outlook in South Vietnam.

2. With reference to Paragraph 1a of General Collins' report we agree that while there exist dissatisfaction and economic difficulties in North Vietnam, the effects of such difficulties though salutary will not be decisive on the attitudes of people in the south. We also agree that a clear indication that South Vietnam is to be defended by the Manila Pact Powers or the US will be essential to the long-term maintenance of an anti-Communist government in South Vietnam.

3. With respect to the role played by the French in support of Diem it is not clear whether General Collins believes that Diem must have full French support or merely French acquiescence.

(a) In Paragraph 1(a) he states that "without French support, and that support is far from assured, the survival of Free Vietnam is problematical." In Paragraph 3 he states that "considering all factors, although the situation in Vietnam is not bright, I believe that if Diem has firm US support and guidance and active French cooperation, or at least acquiescence, his government has a reasonable prospect for success." He then makes the estimate later in the same paragraph that "nevertheless, in my judgment, there is at least an even chance that Vietnam can be saved from Communism if the present progress of its Government are fully implemented." In Paragraph 6(b) General Collins

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stated "with full and faithful support from the French, Diem has a fair chance of success. Without such support, particularly if instead there should be covert obstructionism from the French in the form of support of rival leaders, perhaps, with Bac Dau's connivance, Diem's chances will be materially lessened."

- (b) We believe that the situation has developed to the point where full French support is no longer critical to the survival of Diem's government over the short-term. However, if the French make any serious effort to oppose Diem, he would probably have little chance of success. Moreover, we believe that unless the French act in full accord with US objectives in South Vietnam, the Diem government and the entire non-Communist position in South Vietnam will have little chance of success in the long run. Even with full French support we believe the long-term chances for the survival of an anti-Communist position in South Vietnam remain no better than even.

4. We agree with the estimates concerning French policy made by General Collins, particularly that the French remain undecided as to which of the two alternative courses of action will be adopted. We believe that French policy will continue ambiguous at least so long as the French are uncertain with respect to the extent to which the US is willing to go to maintain a non-Communist South Vietnam.

5. The report of General Collins' does not make any estimate of Vietnamese capabilities to counter large-scale Communist guerrilla efforts, supported by infiltrated units from the North, within the next 18 months and before the Vietnamese Army is trained and reorganized. In this situation, we believe security could only be maintained by the intervention of the French Expeditionary Corps or other outside forces. Present plans for the withdrawal of the PEC may leave insufficient forces at hand in South Vietnam to cope with large-scale internal resistance."

SIRMAN DENT
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